

Patrika

Chinmaya Mission Los Angeles

DECEMBER 2013

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CHINMAYA MISSION
LOS ANGELES

Vedanta, Wisdom, Spiritual Growth

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Over Thirty Years Of Service To Humanity



Upcoming Events

Valmiki Ramayan Discourse Series with Swami Ishwarananda	Jan 13-17	7:30 am to 8:30 pm
Rameshwaram Fourth Anniversary	Jan 18	8:00 am to 12:00 pm
Sadhana Day: Transformation Technology	Feb 1	8:30 am

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Thus Spake The Master

Most people don't listen with the intent to understand. They listen with an intent to reply.

- Swami Chinmayananda

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THINK!

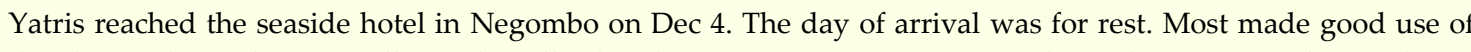
*Sadhana is inner transformation;
At work, it is sincere dedication,
In knowledge, it is sincere application,
In devotion, it is mind's supplication,
In meditation, it is flawless submission,
In essence, it is soul's evolution.*

- Swami Ishwarananda

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Tracing the Ramayana In Sri Lanka, Yatris Return Enriched

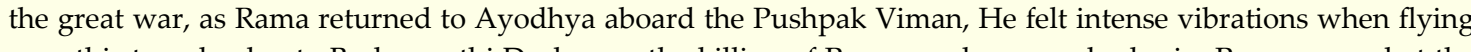
Several paths are prescribed for purity of mind and elimination of *vasanas* to climb the spiritual ladder. Of these, *yatras* in the company of wise and like minded people, is one. 47 CM members from several centers across U.S. and Canada, gathered together to undertake a *yatra* through Sri Lanka, from Dec 3-14, 2013, under the guidance of Swami Ishwarananda.



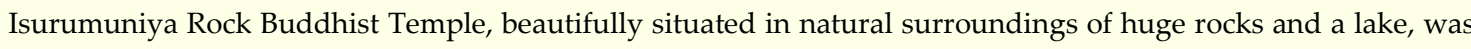
It was truly a rewarding and uplifting experience. Although a foreign country, it did not feel "foreign" in Sri Lanka, due to it's proximity and shared history with India and it's intricate role in the great epic, Ramayana.

Sri Lanka is clean, its citizens friendly and hospitable. The country is blessed with great beaches, luscious landscapes, pretty tea gardens, heavenly flowers and fruits, and of course, historical temples and *stupas* – the very reason for the *yatra*.

Yatris reached the seaside hotel in Negombo on Dec 4. The day of arrival was for rest. Most made good use of the day with a relaxing walk on the silky beach, getting to meet new people in the group and revitalizing friendships with the known ones.



The next day began with a stop at Muneswaram temple in Chilaw. A very old temple of Lord Shiva, it is believed that both Lord Rama and Ravana worshipped Him at this temple. The temple *itihasa* says, that after the great war, as Rama returned to Ayodhya aboard the Pushpak Viman, He felt intense vibrations when flying over this temple, due to Brahmaasthi Dosham - the killing of Ravana, who was a brahmin. Rama paused at the temple to supplicate Lord Shiva for a solution, who in turn instructed Rama to consecrate four lingams. The first one is at Munawari, just five kms from Muneswaram and that was the second stop for the yatris.

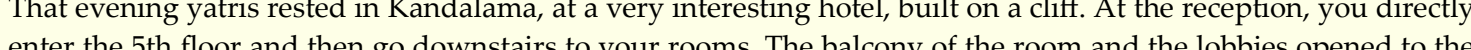


Isurumuniya Rock Buddhist Temple, beautifully situated in natural surroundings of huge rocks and a lake, was the next place of worship. It also has a museum of ancient stone carvings; the most famous being "The Pair of Lovers."

From here, the yatris drove in the luxury buses to Anuradhapura, the first capital of Sri Lanka and now a UNESCO World Heritage site. It is home to the 2,200 year old Sri Maha Bodhiya tree, believed to have grown from a sapling of the original Bodhi tree from Gaya, under which Buddha attained enlightenment. This place also has remnants of Brazen Palace, which was once a monastery housing about 1,000 monks. Close by, there was a stupa, Ruwanweliseya Dagoba, built in 140 B.C. Besides having a significant religious significance for Buddhists, the stupa is an architectural marvel, standing 338 ft tall with a circumference of 950 ft. That night, the yatris stayed at a beautiful Palm Garden Hotel. The hotel was a resort in the forest.



On Day 3, yatris traveled to Trincomalee, home to the sacred Koneswaram Shiva temple. Oh! What a spectacular view! The temple was on a hill, surrounded on three sides by the ocean. It is called "Kailash of the South". Several legends are associated with this temple. One such legend involves Ravana, who was an ardent Shiva devotee and regularly worshipped here. He is believed to have brought the lingam here from the Himalayas. It is also the site of a *Shakti Peeth*. On the way to our next destination we visited Kanniya Hot Water Wells.



That evening yatris rested in Kandalama, at a very interesting hotel, built on a cliff. At the reception, you directly enter the 5th floor and then go downstairs to your rooms. The balcony of the room and the lobbies opened to the natural rocky surroundings. Interestingly, in the lobbies there were bats flying, and lizards on the walls. The next morning, the monkeys paid a visit!

The following morning started with a visit to Sigiriya, the Lion Rock. This is a very interesting huge rock, rises 180 meters, 1600 steps from the bottom to the top. At the top it was flat, almost an acre, with a fortress. This fortress dates back to 477 to 495 AD, and this too, is a UNESCO world heritage site. The rock is of the shape of a lion with the paws carved at the bottom of the stairs. Some yatris climbed to the top and were awestruck with the beauty of the view at that elevation. They also got a chance to meditate with Swamiji on the top of the rock.



There were also visits to a gem factory, spice gardens, a peep into Ayurveda and a Sri Lankan cultural show which was witnessed in the pretty town of Kandy. The popular Buddhist Temple of the Tooth Relic was very crowded.

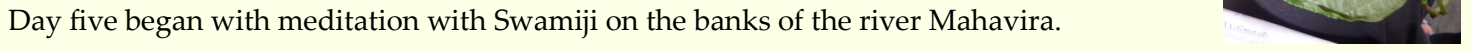
Day five began with meditation with Swamiji on the banks of the river Mahavira.



Then came the visit to the Chinmaya Mission temple of Lord Hanuman atop a mountain in Ramboda – a site picked by Gurudev! Balvihar kids ushered Swamiji and the yatris in with the *poornakhumbam*. Hanumanji's *darshan* was wonderful. The 16ft tall granite idol, was majestic and yet simple, divine and loving, a true Rama *bhakta*. It is believed that when Hanuman first came in search of Sita, He landed on this very spot.



On the way to Nuwara Eliya, there was a stop at Seetha Amman temple. This is the place in Ashok Vaatika, where Ravana kept Sita. There is a small spring in which Sita is believed to have taken her bath. Opposite to that spot, at a considerable distance, is a mountain, on top of which, Ravana's palace was located. From there, he could keep an eye on Sita. On the rock opposite to where Sita sat, are two footprints, believed to be that of Hanuman. Also, the soil in the area is black, believed to be due to the fire of Lanka, which was set ablaze by Hanuman's tail.



No visit to Sri Lanka can be complete without a visit to their famed tea estates. Yatris stopped at the Mackwoods Tea Factory to learn about the varieties of tea.



The next destination was the Yala National Park. Enroute, the buses meandered through beautiful Hakgala botanical gardens, believed to be Ravana's Asoka vatika gardens. There was also a short stop Ravana Falls and the cave by it is where Sita was briefly hidden when Ravana sensed the proximity of Rama's army. Interestingly, it is believed Ravana had a great network of caves for his escape and security.

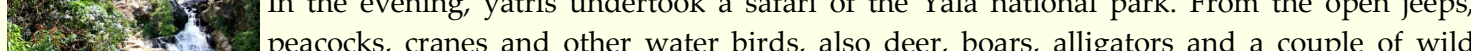
In the evening, yatris undertook a safari of the Yala national park. From the open jeeps, peacocks, cranes and other water birds, also deer, boars, alligators and a couple of wild elephants were spotted.



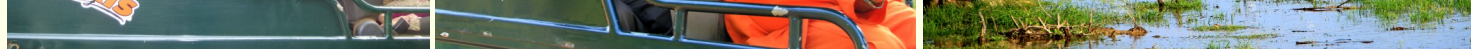
Next morning, was an early start, even before breakfast, to the Kataragama temple. The Lord Karthikeya temple is very important for Hindus as well as Buddhists. Karthikeya protected Rama from the impact of Ravana's *brahmastra* in the battlefield. In this temple, there is no idol of Karthikeya, but only his *yantra*.



In the afternoon, yatris reached Balapitiya, and took a safari on the river Madhuganga, stopping at an island with cinnamon trees. On the boats, they were cruising through water tunnels created by mangrove trees and as the sun was setting, reaching close to the point where the river met the ocean.



In the beautiful town of Bentota, the beach was flawless and the ocean mild. Yatris enjoyed the natural settings and meditated on the beach.



Enroute to Colombo, was the Panchamukha Anjaneya temple. Hanumanji had to take this form to save Rama and Laxman during the war. At the temple, yatris witnessed an interesting ritual of sacrifice of 108 coconuts.

The visit to the Colombo Chinmaya Mission center was like a homecoming! After puja was offered to the Ram Parivar, yatris enjoyed satsang. Gowrie Mahenthiran, CORD Sri Lanka director, spoke of the desperate situation of the people of northern Sri Lanka (Jafna and surrounding areas). Truly, there is a lot of suffering and an urgent need of help in terms of money and manpower. Yatris had tears hearing the plight of women and children in these areas. Within an hour, they joined together to raise \$35,000 to help CORD acquire a small building, to make it a center from where the relief can be coordinated. Until now, they are working from under a tree! Also, some of the visitors pledged to sponsor over 20 children for a whole year. An emotional Gowrie Mahenthiran could not show her appreciation enough and could not hold back tears.

The last stop on the final morning of the yatra, was a visit to the Vibhishana temple. Yatris at the conclusion, said they came back home to their homes in North America, with a mind full of devotion, gratitude, additional knowledge, widened horizons and a strong inspiration to perform better in their spiritual goals.



All of them expressed their gratitude to Swamiji for making this happen for them.



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Please send articles and pictures for publication to Nimmi Raghunathan at nimmicmla@gmail.com

Many thanks for this issue to: Dipti Shah

